

KOPPEL: Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel, and this is Nightline. The big guns of the battleship New Jersey shelled targets in Lebanon today. But in capitals around the world, it's not the sounds of fighting, it's the signal from Washington that's getting the most attention. What will the U.S. pullback in Lebanon mean in the long run? We'll talk about the consequences of the U.S. move with Richard Helms, former director of the CIA and former U.S. ambassador to Iran, and with former CIA deputy director, Admiral Bobby Inman.

KOPPEL: With us live now in our Washington bureau is Richard Helms, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency and former U.S. ambassador to Iran; and from our affiliate, KVUE, in Austin, Texas, Adm. Bobby Inman, former deputy CIA director. Gentlemen, both of you have spent a professional lifetime analyzing events such as these. Ambassador Helms, those big guns off the coast of Lebanon now, are they covering a retreat or somehow setting a new policy?

RICHARD HELMS (Former CIA Director): I don't know that they're doing either, Ted. It seems to me that, uh, with the collapse of the Gemayel government and the disintegration of the Lebanese army, that it's very sensible to pull our Marines out of Beirut and put them aboard the ships at sea. After all, the president, I believe it was last December, said that if the government of Lebanon were to collapse, there was no point in keeping the Marines there. And with the current fighting going on, it seems to me the Marines are a target and they're accomplishing almost nothing of their original mission and, therefore, the time to do is (sic) cut our losses, get them out, and then reassess the situation and see what we can do constructively in a atmosphere (sic) in which the Marines are no longer the issue.

KOPPEL: Well, you raise an interesting point, namely, the statement that the president made last December. It seemed to me that by saying if the government collapses, he was almost saying to the Syrian government, 'Put enough pressure on the Gemayel government, cause it to collapse, and we'll pull out.' HELMS: Well, I don't, I'm sure that that isn't what he had in mind.

KOPPEL: Oh, I'm sure it wasn't. HELMS: And I, and I can't believe that the Syrians took it as meaning that, either. Uh, after all, the situation of the sectarian fighting and so forth is a factor of Lebanese politics, and it may well be that when the Lebanese face the stark reality that there're no more peacekeeping forces there, they may settle down, get some sense of their own, and start to try to put a government back together again that can run the country.

KOPPEL: Admiral Inman, you remember the lamentable days back during the, the last few years of our role in Vietnam, when it at times seemed as though our policy in Vietnam was that we had gotten in there so that we might have the right to withdraw our troops from Vietnam. This is almost beginning to sound the same way. I mean, here we've been in there for 17 months now with the Marines so that we have what, the right to be able to pull them out again? That's not a successful policy. What is our policy? ADMIRAL BOBBY INMAN (Former Deputy Director, CIA): Well, inevitably, you've got a, a no-win situation when you have an unstable government. If you look at this situation in perspective, it was the collapse of the Lebanese army in 1975 that brought about the collapse of the governments and essentially dividing the country of Lebanon, and particularly the city of Beirut, into Christian and Moslem enclaves. Uh, we read a lot of articles after the Israeli invasion that the situation was changed, that now was

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the time to move in and try to rebuild a Lebanese army which would be the foundation for a new Lebanese government, the premise being that we could go back to pre-1975, when a Christian-officer, Moslem-enlisted army was the stabilizing factor in the country. Uh, it's easier to criticize than to offer constructive suggestions.

KOPPEL: Well, let's try the latter, though. Is there, is there a constructive suggestion to be made at this time? INMAN: Well...

KOPPEL: You can't, you can't pound a, you can't pound a government back together again with, with guns. INMAN: No, you cannot. Uh, from, from my reading the press clips here in Austin today, uh, my sense is that the pounding of the guns right now is reacting to the very unusual situation that's developed over the last two days of firing from Syrian-controlled territory into areas of Beirut that have not previously been under fire, particularly the firing on the ambassador's residence, on areas where Americans are residing. You know, even through the, all the stress of the last four or five years, those have not been primary targets for artillery. And, uh, at least my sense from the reading of the clips is that this is not just from the Druse firing down as they have on army positions; it's a conscious decision to fire on Americans and other foreign nationals in different part (sic) of Beirut. If that is, in fact, what the guns are responding to, then it's not likely to last more than a day or two. My sense from, again, from looking at the clips is that we've had a policy decision, uh, flow out from the Long commission to redeploy. Unfortunately, the policy (sic) decision... policy decision didn't get announced in time, and it now looks as though it's a pure reaction to the collapse of the, of the government. Uh, my sense, though, is that the decision actually preceded that.

KOPPEL: All right. Ambassador Helms, how is it possible to, to present this, I mean, even in public relations terms, as being anything but a defeat for the United States and a defeat for U.S. allies in the area? HELMS: Well, I think that's putting it too strong (sic), and I think that it overdramatizes the situation. We're redeploying these Marines. We're taking them out of danger. We're attempting to give a, a, redress a balance here that, uh, has been upset by this, uh, firing and sectarian fighting. And, uh, this may bring, as I said a moment ago, some sense to the various factions in Lebanon that if they want to maintain their country and they want to remain Lebanese rather than being Syrians or Israelis or something else, they better get their act together and actually start to, uh, try to form some kind of a government. It was done once by the French under very difficult circumstances. Lebanon is a remarkably flexible country, and there isn't any reason why they can't at least make a major effort to put it back together again rather than worrying about American troops and Marines and kamikaze killers and all the rest of it.

KOPPEL: All right, gentlemen. We have seen in that area the rise of radical Moslem forces. When we continue our conversation, I'd like to see how you feel their influence in this area, uh, is now to be assessed. We'll continue our conversation in just a moment. And later, we'll have a commentary on the situation in Lebanon from Pat Buchanan.

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KOPPEL: Continuing our conversation now with Adm. Bobby Inman in Austin, and former CI, CIA Director Richard Helms here in Washington. Ambassador Helms, you were making a point before that was based on the supposition that the factions in Lebanon would like to see national unity restored. But some of those factions involve radical Moslems who perhaps owe more than allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran than they do to any sense of Lebanese nationalism. What makes you think that they, for example, or their Syrian backers or their Iranian backers are going to allow that kind of national unity to be restored? HELMS: Well, that's certainly a good point. But I think that it is fair to say that the, ah, those radicals, ah, particularly the Iranian ones, there are only about a thousand of 'em up in the Bekaa Valley under Syrian protection, they can be turned off any time the Syrians want, the Syrians want to turn them off. They are not necessarily identified with the Amal movement, which is the Shiite sect group in the south of Lebanon. And, ah, I regard it as a disturbing influence and, if necessary, destructive influence but not beyond control and that therefore, as the people, the Lebanese themselves begin to focus on the real problem they've got that they're either gonna become Syrian or something else if they don't get themselves better organized politically. I think they will find a way to convince the Syrians to stop this Iranian nonsense.

KOPPEL: Admiral Inman, how do you convince the Syrians, especially since the Syrians are backed by the Soviets, whose interest may not be served by seeing Lebanon restored to, to its previous form or anything even approaching it?

INMAN: All the signs that I see are that the Syrians are not interested in a political settlement inside Lebanon. My reading is that the agreement last May for the, between the Lebanese government and the Israelis for withdrawal is now dead. The critical issue that we face is that you cannot have political stability unless you've got some reasonable peacekeeping means inside. And we were all in hopes that was gonna be the Lebanese army, not the multinational forces.

KOPPEL: All right. So it's not the Lebanese army. It's not the multinational forces. Who stands to fill the void? INMAN: Well, the most likely outcome, I'm sad to say, is, ah, partition or, or if not officially declared partition, at least an effective one with, ah, Syrians the major influence, the Israelis protecting their flanks on the southern side and with the Christians digging in to try to protect an independent enclave on the ocean and to the north.

KOPPEL: All right. Let's assume for the sake of argument that you are correct, that that's what's going to happen. What is the rest of the Arab world and what are our friends and allies in the Persian Gulf, what conclusions are they going to draw from that? INMAN: Well, my, my worry is that we're gonna see the, the tensions grow for another Israeli-Syrian clash. If one could have pulled off a settlement in Beirut, brought another buffer to bear, you might have dampened the, the likelihood of conflict. But I see this as leaving to heighten tension between Israel and Syria. Clearly, the countries in the rest of the Arab world will, ah, some will not be displeased that we're leaving not having accomplished any of our desired objectives. But I think the moderates will recognize that it was not a situation that was one that was likely to be one that was successful at the outset. And they won't be dramatically impacted by this. They'll be watching to see what our other actions are in the area.

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KOPPEL: Ambassador Helms, what does that say, then, about our judgment? What does it, what does it say, for example, in, in, in your old stomping ground in the Persian Gulf to some of our friends over there when they see the United States first of all begin a policy with which they may have disagreed, but then having begun it, seem to pull away from it? HELMS: Well, I don't think that we have pulled away from the policy, Ted. And although I think that it, these countries are going to be worried and, ah, there's gonna be concern, it's what happens in the future that will really count. We haven't lost all that much credibility simply by transferring the Marines from, ah, one point to another. I think the United States is committed to try and restore some kind of a free Lebanon, Lebanese state. I agree with Bob Inman's analysis that what is likely to happen is perhaps another confrontation between Syria and Israel. But the Russians certainly don't want that kind of a confrontation. We certainly don't want that kind of a confrontation, because when that happened before in '68 and '73, nuclear weapons got moved around and the superpowers were closer to clashing than probably they've been any time in the last 40 years. I can't imagine the leadership in the Soviet Union wants to see that. I know our leadership doesn't wanna see that. So there must be some way in which the mind of man can find a way of tamping down this situation to avoid it.

KOPPEL: Well, you, you, you raise a rather frightening question. At least back in 1973, for all the tensions that existed in the Middle East, we still had, ah, a, a fairly active dialogue between Moscow and Washington. And while there is always a dialogue between the superpowers, it seems to be a little sparser now that it's been, ah, perhaps during the past 20 years. HELMS: Yes.

KOPPEL: So what does that say for the situation? HELMS: But when there's a real need for dialogue, there's dialogue. After all, ah, Secretary Shultz had a long talk with Gromyko in, ah, Stockholm. And I'm sure they weren't whistling 'Dixie' the whole time. There are, there are lines of communication. And the Soviets know when to get on the horn, just as we know when to get on the horn. And I think this is one of the situations where it's likely to occur.

KOPPEL: Admiral Inman, ah, in, in the 45 seconds or so that are left to us, do you see the United States and the Soviet Union able to cooperate on restoring some semblance of, of unity in Lebanon? INMAN: I, I don't see any likelihood of collaboration to restore unity in Lebanon. But I do think the prospects....

KOPPEL: Or avoiding, maybe, maybe, maybe that was an unfair question, avoiding a confrontation between Israel and Syria then. INMAN: I, I think the prospects are good that we can do the dialogue to keep it from escalating. We may not be able to keep the Syrians and Israelis from another clash because I'm not sure the Soviets totally control what Syrians do. And the Syrians are gonna be the ones who are gonna feel that they've been the victors in this whole evolution. And they may be sort of feeling their oats when it comes to dealing with the, with the Israelis as well.

KOPPEL: All right. Admiral Inman and Ambassador Richard Helms, thank you very much for joining us this evening.